



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

FREEDOM FROM PRESCRIPTION AN ESSENTIAL CONDITION OF SUCCESS IN OUR SECONDARY EDUCATION

The leading spirits who have inaugurated diversity and freedom in the upper education seem determined that the secondary schools shall submit to prescription and confine studies within a few regular courses. Such is the German and the French idea,—no choice in gymnasium and lycée, no restriction upon choice in the university. Matriculation is a sudden emancipation of the will from fetters, an entire committal of the youth to his own volitions.

In this country the tendency of the secondary schools has been towards diversity. Here and there courses have been confessedly broken up and abandoned, and selection of studies has been allowed. But this tendency towards diversity has shown itself chiefly in the multiplication of kinds or species of schools. Once the only existing school, the Latin school sees itself now the companion on equal terms of a family of sisters which new needs have called into being. All our larger cities are coming to have English, scientific, industrial, commercial, mechanical, high schools. Rarely is a new high school established on the old plan. A new school is an opportunity for the embodiment of a new idea. Modern needs are always consulted. Conservatism is powerless before the spirit of the age.

So also different cities have come to have different schools, not being required by law to follow any one model, but always yielding to public demand. On this school a certain teacher has left the mark of his genius; this school has known how to resist calls for change, and continues yet for a season to show how things were done a generation ago; this school has promptly lopped off studies it could not make interesting, and has added such as it deemed more in accordance with the tastes of youth; this school notably makes work easy,—its diploma is lightly won; this school as notably lives rigidly up to its professions, and its certificate is a weighty document; in this school modern interests are subordinated to the ancient languages; in this the outfit for the teaching of science is peculiarly good, and the scientific teaching

is especially earnest and thorough; in this the pupils actually learn to speak French; in this the conviction prevails that learning to speak a foreign language is impossible.

In America, therefore, education has been developing according to its own law. It will not accept the German model. It cannot possibly endure to be dictated to. Checked now and then by theorists, it will yet go on developing in its own way. This is the way of freedom. Wherever parents plead that their children may take such and such studies, the canonical courses will give way. No school board, in establishing a course, can surround its action with safeguards so solemn that next year's board may not undo everything. Unless courses of study can be got into the state constitutions, there is no hope of their permanence. The gymnasium and the lycée are impossible in America.

A perpetual throttle upon this wholesome freedom of development is the existence of our requirements for admission to college. Though these requirements have been much liberalized in recent years, they still operate as a constricting and prescriptive influence. The college catalogue speaks with an authority wholly factitious, and lays upon secondary teachers a pressure that is artificial and external. Secondary teaching has its own ideals, wholly aloof from the pride of passing examinations. It has its inherent limitations, its own urgent problems. It needs no moulding from alien hands, no goading and nagging by spectators.

The first condition of success in American education is freedom,—freedom to speculate, to experiment, to choose, to reject. No thinker, or committee of thinkers, can prescribe its aims, methods, or proportions. In the long run the American public is sure to have its way; and as this public wants a great many things, its way is sure to be the way of infinite diversity and variety. The one unthinkable thing in our education is uniformity in schools and courses.

S. Thurber